

TENNESSEE REGULATORY AUTHORITY


Deborah Taylor Tate, Chairman
Pat Miller, Director
Sara Kyle, Director
Ron Jones, Director



460 James Robertson Parkway
Nashville, Tennessee 37243-0505

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TO: Docket File No. 04-00062
National A-1 Advertising, Inc.'s Advisory and Petition in Reference of
Reassignment of N11 Number Code

FROM: Glynn Blanton, Chief, Gas Pipeline Safety Division 

RE: Assignment of 811 Dialing Code to National One Call System Pursuant to the
Pipeline Safety Improvement Act of 2002

I am filing this Memorandum for the purpose of providing background information regarding One Call systems and the importance and imminence of an assignment of the 811 Code for use by One Call systems for the prevention of damage to underground utility facilities.

The One Call systems across the nation were established to reduce the large number of incidents involving property damage, personal injury and loss of life resulting from excavation damage to underground utility infrastructure such as pipelines, telephone cables, fiber optic and electrical conduits, water and sewage systems. These facilities have historically been at risk to damage from excavation projects, resulting in the interruption of power and communications, harm to the environment, and loss of life. One Call systems take annually 15,000,000 calls and provide advance notice of excavation work to underground facility operators, which has reduced the incidence and consequences of excavation damage. Nevertheless, such incidents still occur in great number, in part because One Call systems cover different geographic areas and all have individual telephone numbers, diminishing their effectiveness in certain circumstances.

For these reasons, Congress has directed the United States Department of Transportation and the Federal Communications Commission to establish a three-digit toll-free telephone number to access One Call services nationwide which would lead to the broadest possible use of One Call services.

Notwithstanding the fact that One Call systems have been in use for many years and have greatly reduced the number of damages to underground facilities, excavation damage remains the leading cause of failure for natural gas, petroleum, and other hazardous liquid pipelines. Excavation damage is also a major cause of service interruptions for such underground utilities

as local and long-distance telecommunications, cable television, fiber optics, electricity cables and water and sewer lines.

The important first step in preventing excavation damage is advance notification from the excavator to underground facilities operators. With advance notice of proposed excavation, operators can mark the location of their facilities before any digging begins and excavators can safely perform their work. The Pipeline Safety Improvement Act of 2002 (Pub. L. No. 107-355, 116 Stat. 2985 (2002)) attempts to remedy the communication problem created by the fact that each One Call system has its own telephone number. The Act provides

Within 1 year after the date of enactment of this Act, the Secretary of Transportation shall, in conjunction with the Federal Communications Commission, facility operators, excavators, and one-call notification system operators, provide for the establishment of a 3-digit nationwide toll-free telephone number system to be used by State one-call notification systems.

Extensive studies by government agencies have revealed that the most effective way to reduce serious pipeline accidents and improve pipeline safety is by preventing damage to pipelines in the first place. One Call system is a communication system established by operators of underground facilities or state governments, or both, for the purpose of providing a means for excavators and the general public to notify facility operators in advance of their intent to engage in excavation activities. The One Call operations centers receive telephoned notices of intent to excavate and transmit the information to the underground facility operators that participate in the One Call system in that area. Operators that have underground facilities in the area of the proposed excavation site then arrange for the timely identification and marking of the locations of their facilities and often inspect the site during the excavation to oversee the integrity of those facilities. At the present time there are numerous ten-digit numbers to call applicable to One Call centers, which has resulted in a significant barrier to increased usage.

The inadequacy of the current state-by-state One Call system is exacerbated by the increased potential for excavation damage to pipelines and other underground facilities caused by population density and construction in many areas of the country. Pipeline rights-of-way, originally established in rural areas, are now within heavily populated areas. New pipeline construction and construction of other underground facilities such as fiber optics, television cable, and water pipes is increasing. The newer practices of routinely putting telecommunications and electricity services underground enhances the danger of damage from excavation.

In 1999, the Common Ground Alliance ("CGA") was formed by the Research and Special Programs Administration and members of the utilities industry to develop measures to prevent damage to the underground infrastructure caused by excavation activity. The CGA promotes a number of initiatives to increase public awareness about the problems resulting from excavation damage. The CGA established a ten-digit nationwide telephone number (888-258-0808) as a means of improving access to One Call centers. Nevertheless, the effectiveness of this public awareness campaign is limited by the fact that the nationwide number only refers callers to another ten-digit telephone number for a One Call center in their geographic area.

Congress has spoken on this problem by identifying the lack of a single abbreviated dialing code as a serious impediment to the effectiveness of One Call services. The Department of Transportation and the Federal Communications Commission have acknowledged that an abbreviated code will promote the routine use of One Call services on a national scale by eliminating the confusion caused by having to identify which ten-digit telephone numbers to use.

Three-digit dialing codes are a scarce resource and should be allocated only for those uses that best serve the overall public interest. The use of a single, abbreviated dialing code for One Call services will likely lead to increased use of One Call services. Increased usage of the One Call services will translate into a reduction in the number of deaths, bodily injuries and property damage resulting from excavation-related accidents. Increased One Call usage will also reduce economic losses associated with pipeline damage and utility outages to vital services.

The public interest in safety, security and efficiency continues to be jeopardized by excavation damage to underground infrastructure. One Call systems exist as the principal method to prevent such accidents. In an attempt to make One call usage more accessible to the public, Congress has directed the establishment of a single, three-digit nationwide One Call notification service number.

At its November 5, 2003 meeting, the North American Numbering Council (NANC) recommended to the FCC the implementation of an N11 Code, specifically 811, as a nationwide, toll free, three-digit telephone number for One Call systems. In my opinion, the assignment by the FCC of the 811 dialing code for use by One Call systems is imminent because the assignment must be acted on promptly in order to comply with the mandate of the Pipeline Safety Act of 2002. Therefore, the 811 dialing code must not be assigned by the Tennessee Regulatory Authority for a purpose that is not in conformance with the Pipeline Safety Act of 2002.